

Bond CUSD #2
Sorento School Closure
December 2021

Introduction and Background

Beginning in September of 2019, the BCCU2 Board of Education requested district elementary(K-8) attendance boundary lines be analyzed to help balance elementary class size across the district and to address the effects of declining enrollment. Over the past 10 years, overall district enrollment has declined (see exhibit A). This is not just a local trend but seen throughout rural communities in our state and across the country. The 2019 discussion of drawing “hard” boundary lines evoked a great deal of public interest and comments. The BOE heard hundreds of public comments through the regular public comment portion of board meetings, electronic surveys, and three “town hall” style meetings. During the town halls, the superintendent presented information and members of the public could ask questions. As part of that discussion, the BOE requested an additional scenario(G), which closed Sorento school and divided students among Pocahontas and Greenville attendance centers. At that time, the board did not adopt any of the scenarios presented but instead, in a 4-3 vote, voted to allow for open enrollment to continue, on a case by case basis throughout the district.

It is important to note that none of the discussions were based on the quality of education at any of our district schools. There is not one school “better” than the others. All of our schools provide welcoming and nurturing environments that positively impact the lives of students. The rationale for boundary discussion was directly related to equalizing class size across the district.

Current Reality

1) Declining enrollment and class size equity:

Our district K-12 enrollment continues to decrease (see Appendix A). Our overall enrollment has dropped 275 students since the 2010-2011 school year. Declining enrollment across the district creates challenges in balancing class sizes at the elementary levels. The BOE has heard public comment from Sorento parents about the benefits of smaller class sizes. One of the goals of this recommendation is to provide smaller class sizes for all students and teachers, across the district. Single digit class sizes are not a common nor efficient practice in k-12 education (Appendix B). As such, for the 2021-2022 school year, two grade levels were combined between Sorento and Pocahontas. The combined 3rd grade meets at Pocahontas and has 13 students from Pocahontas and 7 students from Sorento. The 4th grade class meets in Sorento with 10 students from Pocahontas, 11 students from Sorento. In addition, the Sorento 1st and 2nd grade teachers have the smallest student population of the district. All grade levels at GES have 4 sections resulting in class sizes ranging from 18 to 23 students per teacher. In the 3rd and 4th grades, where SES and PES students are combined, their combined enrollments are equal to or less than class sizes at GES. Should the board vote to close SES, administration would work to balance class sizes using The **ISBE Evidence Based Model** recommendations for class size. Historically, BCCU2 class sizes have varied greatly and

at times far exceeded EBM recommendations, primarily due to budgetary constraints. EBM class size recommendations are as follows:

| Grade Levels | Low Income | Non Low Income |
|--------------|------------|----------------|
| K-3 | 15:1 | 20:1 |
| 4-12 (Core) | 20:1 | 25:1 |

Another consideration for class size is students in special education that are “pulled out” of the regular education classroom to receive additional supports. Many special education caseloads are unbalanced. Combination of classrooms and reallocation of staff can help balance the numbers of students with IEPs on caseload managers.

- 2) **Greater student needs as a result of the pandemic-** Many students have been adversely impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic and disruptions to “in-person” learning. In addition, we are seeing the need for more social/emotional support to our students as a result of traumatic events they have experienced over the last 20 months. Our current organizational staffing and structure makes it extremely difficult to meet these needs across our district.

- 3) **Economic Uncertainty-** We are seeing the “cost of doing business” going up in all facets of operations:
 - Hyperinflation in nearly every aspect of operations
 - Energy
 - Insurance
 - Labor (wages, salary, benefits)
 - Building maintenance/construction
 - Fuel

- 4) **Labor shortages-** Our district has unfilled positions in nearly every category of non-certified employees. If the BOE chooses to close Sorento, nearly all non-certified staff can be reallocated to fill positions across the district.

Recommendation

- Close Sorento School at the end of the 2021-2022 school year.
- Re-allocate and add certified and noncertified assigning them based on student need throughout the district
 - **Additional Certified Positions**
 - School Social Worker
 - Psychologist
 - Reading Interventionist (2) *directly help with learning loss*
 - Behavior Specialist (2) *trauma, social emotional needs*
 - Instructional Coaches (4) *implement best practices and direct assistance to teachers and students, addressing learning loss*

- Certified positions at the HS level (math and Special Education)
two very difficult positions to fill year after year
- Elementary Assistant Principal
- **Additional Non-Certified**
 - Classroom Aides
 - Most non-certified positions would be re-allocated to meet existing staffing shortages
- Redistribute students to Pocahontas Center, Greenville Elementary, and Greenville Junior High (modifying current transportation routes sends around 75 to GES/GJH and 43 to PES)
- Enrollments at these centers would still be less than historic highs

Potential Cost Savings:

The recommendation to close Sorento school would help the district's financial position. Should the BOE vote to close Sorento, there will be savings. However, more than pure cost saving, the decision would allow the district to sustain programs and interventions supported by grant funds(Federal ESSER) in a long term way, even after grant funds are exhausted. In addition, there are operational savings and potential personnel savings through reduction in force (RIF) of some certified positions. Due to a majority of the teachers in Sorento being higher on the BCCU2 seniority list, it is unlikely they would be included in any potential RIF scenario. The Union and BOE would work together according to the RIF procedures outlined in the Illinois School Code to determine what/if any positions were to be RIF'ed. In addition, the district would see savings due to the elimination of long term maintenance and health/life safety improvements estimated at over \$2,000,000 over the next 5 years.

- Operational Savings (utilities, supplies, etc.): **\$125,000** annually
- Personnel Savings- some staff would be reallocated while some positions eliminated
 - Non Cert Positions:
 - all positions re-allocated
 - Certified Positions:
 - Reallocated: 10
 - Eliminated positions: 5 - **\$274,000**
- Personnel Savings: 5 positions @ \$54,800 (avg. elementary non-tenured teacher compensation package from 2019)= \$274,000
- **Total Estimated Annual Savings \$399,000**

Transportation:

- Closing a building could lead to more students riding a bus. The estimated transportation cost increase is estimated at \$20,000-\$25,000 with increased hours, bus aides, and a potential additional route. Currently, our district has a few students who ride a bus for over an hour, one way. These students and families typically live on the outermost borders of our district. Should, the BOE vote to close Sorento, we will do our best to minimize bus riding time but anticipate new routes, as a result of closing Sorento, would not be greater than our current longest riders. Our district re-evaluates bus routes every year, due to student enrollment and address changes. We would do our best to provide a continuation of service that provides efficiency with the goal of minimizing ride times.

Space and existing Sorento building :

- It is possible for all students from Sorento to attend Pocahontas and Greenville without modifications to existing facilities.
- Should the board vote to close the school, the BOE would need to decide what to do with the existing property:
 - Negotiate a deal with the village of Sorento to ‘turn over’ the property for community use
 - Sell through auction
 - Sell through sealed bid process

KRP:

- Because the KRP program is based on family and student needs, rather than geographic location, we would seek to rent “space” in the Sorento community for a KRP classroom. This would be allowable under the PreSchool for All grant provisions and would have no impact on grant funding while providing a community based Preschool option.

Curriculum Possibilities:

- The transfer of students to Pocahontas and Greenville JH could provide an opportunity for departmentalized curriculum and teaching throughout BCCU2. Currently, 6th grade at Pocahontas and Sorento are self-contained whereas GJH has departmentalization. Standardizing the JH curriculum through departmentalizing will help with vertical and horizontal curriculum alignment as well as collaboration and enhanced professional development for educators. Additional revenue also presents an opportunity for electives and advanced classes to be offered at the JH level. Additional resources could also support expanded curricular offerings at the HS level, including more “hands on ” opportunities such as additional STEM and vocational classes. It could provide for expanded electives courses at the HS level as well. At the elementary level, these resources could be used to reduce class sizes so they align with the recommendations of the Evidence Based Funding model as well as provide additional intervention and supports for struggling students, both academically and socially/emotionally.

Cons:

- Closing a neighborhood school is an emotional issue for all involved with the school and surrounding community. The consequences from a cultural/climate perspective could be long lasting.
- Although some positions would be reallocated, there could be Reduction in Force (RIF) notices given to certified staff. In short, people would likely lose jobs.
- Student transition could be an issue for some students. Research shows that students are more likely to get “off track” during transition times. This would be the case with boundary changes or attendance centers as well.

Options for the Board to consider

1. **Close Sorento School at the end of 2021-2022** -allow continued open enrollment for K-8 students between Pocahontas and Greenville Elementary/Jr. High beginning the 2022-2023 school year

2. **District Wide Grade Level Attendance Centers**- organize as grade level attendance centers, thereby organizing building use around grade levels. For example- **all** Kindergarten students and teachers would be located in one center. Another example of what this might look like in Unit 2 is:

| Grade Levels | Location |
|--------------|-----------------------|
| K-1 | Greenville Elementary |
| 2-3 | Sorento |
| 4-5 | Pocahontas |
| 6-8 | GJH |

Pros:

- Equalize Class Size
- Alignment of grade level resources, staff, professional development
- District wide departmentalization 4-8 grades
- Streamlined IEP services

Cons:

- Families with multiple children could have students attending school in 3 different communities
- Exponentially increase transportation across the district-significant cost increase
- No cost savings
- Creates change for nearly all K-8 students in the district

*Pre-k sections could remain in PES and SES, providing a local Pre-K solution

3. **Sorento/Pocahontas Grade Level Attendance Centers**- have Sorento and Pocahontas schools organize as attendance centers while keeping Greenville Elementary and Greenville JH the same. This model assumes current student populations with K-8 open enrollment.

| Grade Levels | Location |
|--------------|------------|
| K-3 | Sorento |
| 4-8 | Pocahontas |

| 2022-2023 | Option 3: Sorento(K-3)/Pocahontas(4-8) Projected Class Sizes | | | | | | | | | |
|-------------|--|---------|---------|---------|---------|---------|-----|-----|-----|-------|
| School | K | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 | 8 | Total |
| GJH | | | | | | | 82 | 94 | 100 | 276 |
| GES (# sec) | 80 (4) | 72 (4) | 79 (4) | 86 (4) | 83 (4) | 92 (4) | | | | 492 |
| POC (# sec) | | | | | 20 (1) | 21 (1) | 35 | 34 | 32 | 142 |
| SOR (# sec) | 15 (1) | 29 (2) | 26 (2) | 19 (1) | | | | | | 89 |
| Grade Total | 95 (5) | 101 (6) | 105 (6) | 105 (5) | 103 (5) | 113 (5) | 117 | 128 | 132 | |

Pros:

- Equalize Class Size
- Alignment of grade level resources, staff, professional development
- District wide departmentalization 4-8 grades
- Some cost savings with re-allocation of staff

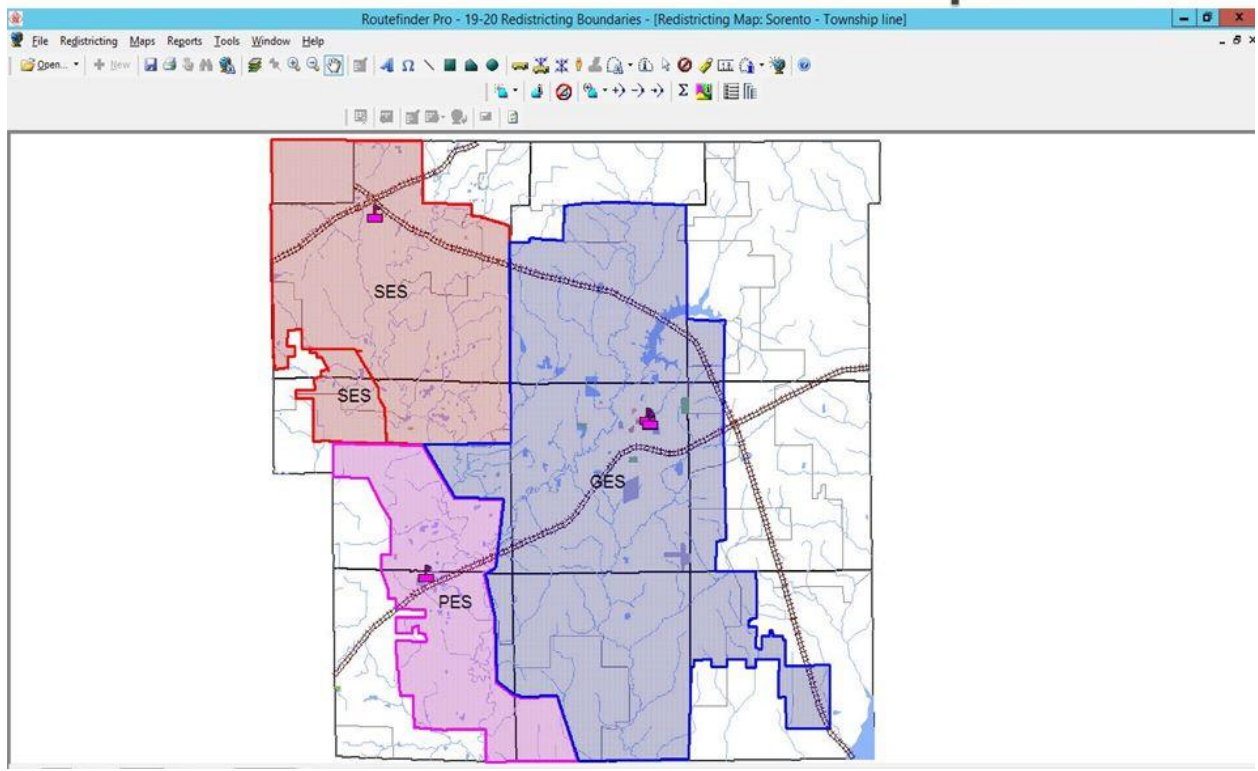
Cons:

- Families with multiple children could have students attending school in different communities
- Potential increase in transportation
- Little cost savings

*Pre-k sections could remain in PES and SES, providing a local Pre-K solution

- 4. Draw hard boundary lines with no open enrollment or grandfathering-** drawing “hard” boundary lines based upon Scenario “C” from the 2019 Boundary Analysis Study. Scenario “C” expands the south and eastern borders of Sorento Elementary to the township line(east) and down to HWY 140(south). This would include the area of Old Ripley beginning the 2022-2023 school year. We are still developing the model for this with current student data. The results from the 2019-2020 study show this scenario as the most realistic to balance enrollment between Pocahontas and Sorento.

Scenario C – Sorento to Twp line



Scenario C–

•Enrollment Projections (2019 enrollment data)

- GES/GJH-789
- PES-160
- SES-152

Scenario C

| School | K | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 | 8 | Total (k-12) |
|------------------------------|------------|------------|------------|------------|------------|------------|----|-----|----|--------------|
| GES/GJH (avg. class size) | 84 (21) | 94 (24) | 86 (22) | 69 (17) | 86 (22) | 88 (22) | 91 | 105 | 91 | 789 |
| POC | 13 | 13 | 13 | 18 | 21 | 16 | 19 | 19 | 27 | 160 |
| SOR | 14 | 15 | 13 | 20 | 22 | 14 | 15 | 18 | 19 | 152 |
| Total | | | | | | | | | | 1101 |

Pros:

- Would increase enrollment at Sorento
- Keeps community schools open
- Would better balance class sizes between Pocahontas and Sorento

Cons:

- Does not guarantee class size equity
- Boundary lines would need to be considered on an annual basis in order to balance school enrollment and class size equity
- Creates uncertainty from year to year for families in “grey” areas
- Open enrollment “choice” would not be an option
- No cost savings

5. **Do nothing-** The Board could decide to make no changes to the K-8 attendance centers and the keep the current policy of open enrollment for the 2022-2023 school year

Pros:

- Keeps community schools open
- Would allow time for outside consultant to do a study on enrollment, boundaries, and finances over the next year
- Does not create any immediate change for students

Cons:

- Does nothing to equalize class size
- No cost savings
- Added positions and programs needed to meet the needs of students and from federally funded grants would be in question when funds expire in 2023.

APPENDIX A

| | 2007 /08 | 2008 /09 | 2009 /10 | 2010 /11 | 2011 /12 | 2012 /13 | 2013 /14 | 2014 /15 | 2015 /16 | 2016 /17 | 2017 /18 | 2018 /19 | 2019 /20 | 2020 /21 | 2021 /22 |
|---------------------------|-------------|-------------|-------------|-------------|-------------|-------------|-------------|-------------|-------------|-------------|-------------|-------------|-------------|-------------|-------------|
| BCCU # 2 High School | 564 | 571 | 563 | 554 | 570 | 572 | 543 | 531 | 534 | 537 | 524 | 539 | 535 | 537 | 554 |
| Greenville Jr High School | 308 | 316 | 318 | 293 | 289 | 297 | 292 | 303 | 292 | 297 | 299 | 294 | 294 | 277 | 287 |
| Greenville Elem School | 583 | 563 | 587 | 619 | 605 | 607 | 572 | 565 | 531 | 531 | 556 | 546 | 528 | 481 | 494 |
| Pocahontas Center (K-8) | 198 | 195 | 218 | 206 | 212 | 192 | 209 | 197 | 218 | 207 | 178 | 185 | 169 | 156 | 143 |
| Sorento Elem School (K-8) | 153 | 151 | 174 | 179 | 170 | 167 | 165 | 150 | 157 | 149 | 145 | 119 | 107 | 108 | 107 |
| Pre-K (all District) | 175 | 147 | 150 | 89 | 89 | 121 | 126 | 156 | 153 | 118 | 122 | 129 | 107 | 137 | 118 |
| Total(K-12) | 1806 | 1796 | 1860 | 1851 | 1846 | 1835 | 1781 | 1746 | 1732 | 1722 | 1709 | 1683 | 1633 | 1559 | 1585 |
| Total Housed | 1985 | 1971 | 2033 | 1977 | 1978 | 1892 | 1941 | 1902 | 1885 | 1840 | 1831 | 1812 | 1740 | 1696 | 1703 |

*All Enrollment Numbers come from ISBE Fall Housing Report

2010 1860
 2022 1585
 275
 0.14785

APPENDIX B

| 2021-2022 | Grade Level Totals | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
|-------------|--------------------|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|--------------|
| School | PreK | K | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 | 8 | 9 | 10 | 11 | 12 | Total (k-12) |
| BCCU2 HS | | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 139 | 139 | 144 | 132 | 554 |
| GJH | | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 94 | 100 | 93 | | 0 | 0 | 0 | 287 |
| GES | | 72 | 79 | 86 | 83 | 92 | 82 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 494 |
| POC | | 16 | 17 | 10 | 20 | 1 | 18 | 18 | 24 | 19 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 143 |
| SOR | | 13 | 9 | 9 | | 20 | 17 | 16 | 10 | 13 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 107 |
| Grade Total | | 101 | 105 | 105 | 103 | 113 | 117 | 128 | 134 | 125 | | | | | 1585 |

*3rd Grade at Pocahontas: 13 students from Pocahontas, 7 students from Sorento

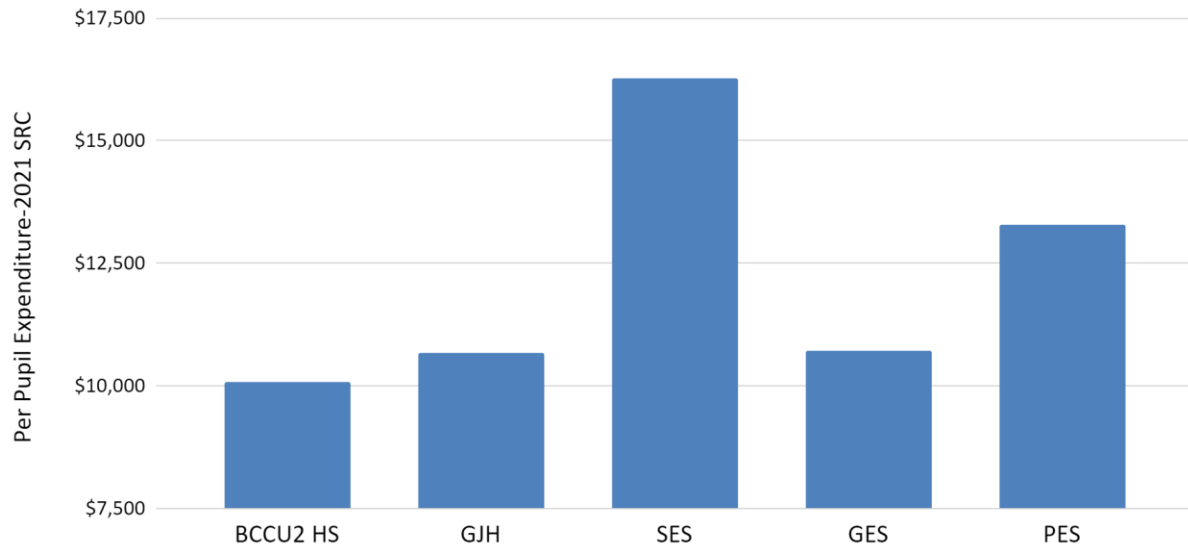
*4th Grade at Sorento: 10 students from Pocahontas, 11 students from Sorento (1 POC student attends Cornerstone)

APPENDIX C

| Current Pre-K(Includes 3-5 year olds) | Location | K #'s | 2022-23 K students |
|---------------------------------------|------------|-------|--------------------|
| 115 | Greenville | 110 | 64 |
| 16 | Pocahontas | 16 | 11 |
| 7 | Sorento | 9 | 5 |
| 138 | Total | 125 | 80 |

| School | Poverty Percentage – from 2021 School Report Card (SRC) | Per Pupil Expenditure - from 2021 SRC |
|----------|---|---------------------------------------|
| BCCU2 HS | 43.30% | \$10,082 |
| GJH | 47.50% | \$10,667 |
| SES | 50% | \$16,267 |
| GES | 53% | \$10,719 |
| PES | 56.80% | \$13,285 |

Per Pupil Expenditure-2021 SRC



Poverty Percentage vs. School

